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Misunderstanding Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Area?

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Misunderstanding Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Area?

Kimberly Marten
Thomas H. Johnson
and M. Chris Mason

To the Editors (Kimberly Marten writes):

In "No Sign until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier," Thomas Johnson and Chris Mason argue that Pashtun tribal identities explain the lure of the Taliban and the shortcomings of the initial U.S. approach to the war in Afghanistan.¹ They carry this argument too far, however, and engage in cultural reductionism by portraying the Pashtun tribal code as the determining factor behind politics and preferences in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA). Johnson and Mason make the following errors: (1) treating Pashtun identity as if it were set in stone; (2) failing to consider that today's radical Islamists rely on different sources of support than did the mullahs (Islamic religious leaders) who led jihads against the British Empire; and (3) misinterpreting the role of the official maliks (tribal and village leaders) in the FATA.

IDEALIZING AN IDENTITY

Johnson and Mason state that "Pashtuns identify themselves in terms of their familial ties and commitments, and have a fundamentally different way of looking at the world" (p. 51). The authors assume that a shared identity determines Pashtun preferences and actions. Yet the literature on ethnic conflict and nationalism has established that individuals have multiple identities; the influence of any one identity on particular thoughts and actions depends on its salience at the time.² Different aspects of identity can be brought to the forefront by people's socioeconomic circumstances or can be bolstered by political entrepreneurs seeking populist support.

This remains true for the Pashtuns despite the supposed overwhelming authority of their tribal code. Pashtuns have proved remarkably mobile; they have often adapted successfully to circumstances far outside their stateless homeland; and they are known

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1. Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "No Sign until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Spring 2008), pp. 41–77. Subsequent references to this article appear parenthetically in the text.

2. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991); Ernst Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983); and Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001).

for their success in migrating both socially and geographically.³ They have been a major source of recruits for both the British Imperial and Pakistani armies. Many have labored on construction projects in urban Pakistan. In addition, Pashtuns dominate the trucking and transport trade in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. During the 1970s' oil boom, virtually every family in the FATA is believed to have sent at least one of its young men to work in the Persian Gulf.⁴ Pashtun refugees from rural Afghanistan have become deeply embedded in the urban Pakistani economy as skilled laborers.⁵

These commercial and employment activities are at odds with the Pashtuns' tribal code. The code scorns the pursuit of business and commerce as something lowly and not Pashtun (the word for "shopkeeper" is an insult in the Pashto language). Real Pashtun men are supposed to pursue agnatic (cousin) rivalry in their barren mountain homeland, spurning life in the "settled" regions and using their incomes primarily to support the hospitality they show in competition with their cousins.⁶

Even more tellingly, the vast majority of Pashtuns inside Pakistan live not in the stateless FATA tribal region (with a total population of slightly more than 3 million, according to the latest, 1998 census data⁷), but in the settled North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), whose population includes around 14 million Pashtuns.⁸ Well-to-do Pashtun families often have homes in both the FATA and the NWFP. Those living in the NWFP are integrated into the politics and business of the state, participating in universal adult suffrage and joining political parties at both the provincial and national levels. Pashtuns also dominate the NWFP's provincial bureaucracy. Since the February 2008 parliamentary elections, one of the key issues on the FATA agenda has become whether and how the FATA might become a "normal," integrated, state-penetrated province of Pakistan.⁹

Furthermore, Johnson and Mason's statement that Pashtuns have a "fundamentally different way of looking at the world" begs the question: Different from whom? Clan

3. Paul Titus, "Honor the Baluch, Buy the Pushtun: Stereotypes, Social Organization, and History in Western Pakistan," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (July 1998), pp. 657–687.

4. Shahid Javed Burki, "What Migration to the Middle East May Mean for Pakistan," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Spring 1980), pp. 47–66; Akbar S. Ahmed, "The Arab Connection: Emergent Models of Social Structure among Pakistani Tribesmen," *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (June 1981), pp. 167–172; and Jonathan S. Addleton, *Undermining the Centre: The Gulf Migration and Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1992), especially pp. 89–92, 138.

5. Randolph Martin, "Regional Dynamics and the Security of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2000), pp. 71–78; and Daniel A. Kronenfeld, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2008), pp. 43–63.

6. Akbar S. Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society: Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 28, 97–98; and Stephen Alan Rittenberg, *Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Pakhtuns: The Independence Movement in India's North-West Frontier Province* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1988), p. 25.

7. Figure taken from the table "Area and Population of Urban and Rural Areas by Provinces and Pakistan," FATA Development Statistics, Bureau of Statistics, Planning, and Development Department, Government of NWFP; available at <http://www.nwfpbos.sdn.pk.org/fds/1999/pop1.htm>.

8. The entire population of the NWFP was 21 million as of the 1998 census, and one-third of the population is believed not to be Pashtun. "NWFP" Infrastructure Project Development Facility, Pakistan Ministry of Finance; available at http://www.ipdf.gov.pk/tmpnew/DF_NWFP.php.

9. For background on this issue, see Mumtaz A. Bangash, "FATA: Towards a New Beginning," in Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema and Maqsoodul Hasan Nuri, eds., *Tribal Areas of Pakistan: Challenges and Responses* (Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 2005), pp. 43–69.

ties and the importance of upholding family honor are far from unique to the Pashtuns, having played an important role in violent insurgent behavior in areas of the world including Iraq, Somalia, and Chechnya.¹⁰ Yet most of these areas have also witnessed periods when statehood flourished. Saddam Hussein held Iraq together for decades. Since the 2003 U.S. invasion, furthermore, sectarian violence in that country has aimed at seizing state control or establishing separately governed states, not at ending statehood. Chechnya was a quiescent part of the Soviet Union until the Gorbachev era; now Chechen warlord Ramzan Kadyrov, the elected leader of the republic's government, has brokered a deal accepting Russian rule in return for rebuilding Chechnya's shattered economy. Even in Somalia, whose central and southern regions are suffused with anarchic violence, the provinces of Somaliland and Puntland have established what amount to state governance structures based on tribal codes of conduct.

MUDDLING THE MULLAHS

Johnson and Mason claim that the political rise of mullahs in the border areas in the late 1970s and their later spawning of the Taliban are congruent with the historical culture of the tribal region. The authors, however, fail to consider the implications arising from the fact that radical mullahs are now primarily supported by outsiders.

Johnson and Mason describe how the Pakistani government created the new phenomenon of powerful Islamist mullahs and madrasas, first to counteract the growing attractiveness of Pashtun nationalism in the tribal areas, and then to lead a jihad against the Soviet presence on Pakistan's borders, using assistance from Saudi Arabia and the United States.¹¹ As the authors note, the Pakistani state intentionally empowered the mullahs "at the expense of the tribal elders, khans, and maliks" (p. 70). Yet if tribal culture is so powerful, how could the government force these malik-challenging mullahs on FATA society, any more than outsiders can force political penetration on the region today?

Johnson and Mason attempt to answer this question by portraying the rise of the mullahs as part of a continuing pattern in Pashtun history. So-called mad mullahs led uprisings against the British Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (pp. 53–54), and Johnson and Mason hold that the new Islamist mullahs have simply been leading a traditional uprising against Soviet (and later U.S.) interference in Pashtun affairs. In an earlier article, the authors posit that Mullah Omar, the founder of the Taliban, is an incarnation of the traditional charismatic mystics who led such jihads in the past, predicting that if he is assassinated, the Taliban and the jihad will crumble.¹²

The authors ignore a fundamental difference between the two eras, however. In earlier times, mullahs received sustenance and protection by attaching themselves in a pa-

10. Richard H. Shultz Jr. and Andrea Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias: The Warriors of Contemporary Combat* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

11. The authors miss one crucial episode in Pakistan's and Saudi Arabia's decisions to support conservative Sunni madrasas: the 1979 Shiite revolution in Iran, which many officials feared could spark sectarian uprisings against Sunni state dominance in the region. Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle with Militant Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 77–78.

12. Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan," *Orbis*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Winter 2007), p. 80.

tronage relationship to tribal leaders.¹³ Although a favored mullah might occasionally receive a hereditary land grant from a wealthy khan that freed him from subservience, most mullahs led impoverished lives and survived on alms.¹⁴ It was therefore not in the mullah's interest to challenge the political preferences of the malik, because his word was unenforceable without malik support, unless he was the rare persona who could attract his own *lashkar* (temporary militia) by virtue of his charisma. Mullahs and maliks reinforced one another's authority.¹⁵

The more recent Islamist mullahs, in contrast, arose independently from the tribes, because they were funded and armed by outsiders rather than from within by tribal elders. Even after the externally funded jihad against the Soviets ended, much of the financing for radical Islamist madrasas continued to come from Pakistanis living abroad,¹⁶ not from local maliks. Now the Islamists are supported by foreign al-Qaida operatives who rent housing and facilities in the FATA, and also by their participation in the transnational heroin trade. Many radical mullahs became part of the "Kalashnikov culture" that suffused the tribal areas after the Soviet war in Afghanistan. Some have coerced neighborhoods and villages at gunpoint into observing an unpopular form of sharia, using their militias to enforce personal dress and grooming codes and to shut down suspect shops. As Johnson and Mason note, the more radical mullahs have also mustered the means to assassinate hundreds of maliks (p. 57).

In an indication of the tenuousness of local support for these radicals, Pashtuns have turned to the ballot box—a state institution—to challenge their rise. The Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal party alliance, representing many of the more radical mullahs, was voted out in the February 2008 elections in the NWFP despite its 2002 landslide victory, largely because it could not provide two public goods usually associated with well-functioning states: economic development and physical security.¹⁷

MISREADING THE MALIKS

Johnson and Mason also fundamentally misunderstand the role of maliks in modern Pashtun society. They argue that khans (the wealthy landowners of the fertile Pashtun valleys) are only "primus inter pares," and that maliks (in all Pashtun regions) are democratically chosen; the council of all adult men (the jirga) in the tribe and clan provides rule by consensus (p. 62). The tribal code sees all honorable adult men as having equal political authority.

In theory, this description is correct. In historical fact, however, the British Empire subverted that system long ago. Outsiders preferred to work with select individuals to try to control the tribal regions, rather than going through the cumbersome jirga route for negotiations. As a result, the British artificially empowered selected (i.e., "official") maliks and gave them hereditary stipends. These favored maliks received special personal compensation on top of the money distributed to the jirga, typically amounting to

13. Sana Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo-Afghan Borderland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 71.

14. Rittenberg, *Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Pakhtuns*, pp. 36–37.

15. Haroon, *Frontier of Faith*, pp. 67–68.

16. Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan*, pp. 85–86.

17. Joshua T. White, "Pakistan's New Frontier," *Wall Street Journal Asia*, March 4, 2008.

an additional 7 percent commission beyond what was paid to the tribe as a whole.¹⁸ In direct violation of the tribal code, the maliks accepted this arrangement.¹⁹ Johnson and Mason argue that if these British-selected individuals became too cut off from tribal mores, they could be ousted by the jirga. But the favored maliks used their subventions to set up patronage systems that ensured their continuing influence over the jirga.

Johnson and Mason argue that Britain's attempt to impose its rule through individuals failed (pp. 52–53), causing it to give up trying to control the region. Yet even though the British indeed received little value for their payments, the structure they created has endured. When the Pakistani state declared independence in 1947, it had to negotiate with the maliks to gain the allegiance of the tribal areas, and decided to continue the policy of individual hereditary subvention to ensure continued malik loyalty.²⁰ As a result, mainstream Pashtun society has long assumed that many of the maliks are, by definition, corrupt.²¹ For example, when the government offered development assistance to the FATA in the early 1970s in a bid to thwart support for a separatist Pashtunistan, the official maliks received not only monetary rewards for their cooperation in providing land for state projects, but also control over construction contracts for schools, hospitals, and roads that were then often shoddily built by members of the maliks' families.²² They have controlled who in the FATA receives everything from government jobs and scholarships to visas for labor migration, favoring their family members and clients over others.

It is thus unrealistic to expect that the Pashtun population will rally around the maliks as a source of legitimate authority. Johnson and Mason are correct that the maliks have provided "the only stabilizing force that the region has ever known" (p. 73). But this stability has served the interests of an elite old guard, which is widely believed to be colluding with the local representatives of the Pakistani state to further the corrupt business interests of their own families.²³

CONCLUSION

Johnson and Mason perform a valuable service for policymakers by revealing the tribal loyalties and cultural tendencies that influence the politics of the FATA. But their recommendations for solving the FATA's problems, including "strengthen[ing] and rebuild[ing] the tribal structures from the inside" (p. 73), and restoring the mullahs "to

18. Haroon, *Frontier of Faith*, p. 23.

19. Lal Baha, *N.W.F.P. Administration under British Rule, 1901–1919* (Islamabad: National Commission on Historical and Cultural Research, 1978), p. 34; Rittenberg, *Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Pakhtuns*, p. 8; and Haroon, *Frontier of Faith*, pp. 14–24.

20. Rashid Ahmad Khan, "Political Developments in FATA: A Critical Perspective," in Cheema and Nuri, *Tribal Areas of Pakistan*, pp. 25–42.

21. Akbar S. Ahmed, *Religion and Politics in Muslim Society: Order and Conflict in Pakistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 35.

22. Haider Zaman, "Problems of Education, Health, and Infrastructure in FATA," in Cheema and Nuri, *Tribal Areas of Pakistan*, pp. 72–87; and Fazal-ur-rahim Marwat, "The Genesis of Change and Modernization in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan," *IPRI Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Summer 2007), pp. 73–86.

23. Abubakar Siddique, "Pakistan: New Government Announces Major Reforms in Tribal Areas," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty online news service, April 11, 2008; available at <http://www.rferl.org>.

their traditional role of spiritual advisers and mentors to the people" (p. 74), are unworkable. There is no category of traditional leaders left today that enjoys true legitimacy.

The ideal outcome might be for the FATA to achieve integration as (or perhaps within) a constituent province of Pakistan. It must be recognized, though, that change through constitutional elections threatens the dominance of both the radical mullahs and the remaining official maliks, who are likely to use their resources to try to thwart it. What is needed to resolve this situation is not the kind of stability that has benefited the old guard, but the inspiration and revolutionary empowerment of the ordinary Pashtun populace.

—Kimberly Marten
New York City, New York

Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason Reply:

We thank Kimberly Marten for her letter in response to our article.¹ Marten makes a number of points, some valid, some less so. Before addressing her main criticisms, we would like to briefly restate our central argument.

OUR ANALYSIS

In our article we argue that an understanding of Pashtun tribal culture, social architecture, and history is critical in assessing why a significant portion of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region has become home to extremist groups such as the Taliban and al-Qaida. We suggest that this border area is susceptible to religious extremist movements and resistant to the imposition of external governance, in part because of the Pashtun's unique social code known as Pashtunwali, a remarkable set of social values and unwritten but universally understood precepts that define Pashtun culture and the Pashtun ideal type. Yet while the Pashtun tribal culture and the ethos of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area are important, to be understood they need to be assessed in the context of the complex geographical, political, historical, and religious factors that helped create them. We conclude by positing that in both southern Afghanistan and the tribal areas of Pakistan, rather than seeking to "extend the reach of the central government," which simply foments insurgency among a proto-insurgent people, the United States and the international community should be doing everything in their means to empower the tribal elders and restore balance to a tribal/cultural system that has been disintegrating since the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979.

MARTEN'S CRITIQUE

Perhaps the best way to address Marten's comments is to respond to them in the order in which they are raised. Marten first suggests that numerous Pashtuns are economic

1. Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "No Sign until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Spring 2008), pp. 41–77. Further references to this article appear parenthetically in the text.

migrants. Fair enough. Our article, however, does not concern itself with the Pashtun Diaspora, but rather with the behavior of the Pashtun still in the tribal areas. It is unclear to us why the diaspora is germane to our research question or analysis. We are not sure what the applicability of Pashtun taxi drivers in London, for example, would be to the behavior of their shepherding cousins still in the hills of Waziristan. But even those who leave temporarily, we would suggest, generally take their social code with them: Scotland Yard reportedly maintains a database of known clan feuds in Pakistan to generate leads to potential suspects in murders of Pashtuns in Great Britain, for example. Indeed, we suspect the enduring power of Pashtunwali values after generations in London or California is a better argument for our perspective than against it. As Olivier Roy has written, "Afghan identity is based on a common political culture which could be summarized as follows. 'Real' political life is played out at the local level and primary loyalty lies with a 'solidarity group,' whatever its sociological basis. This function can be fulfilled by any community, clan, tribe, village etc., composed of an extended network of people who tend to consider that they are protected by this group affiliation and that they could build on it for whatever purpose (business relations, political constituency, patronage and clientelism, and also—during the war—armed resistance)."²

Marten does not appear to acknowledge that for the Pashtun, vital social and political concepts such as justice are inextricably linked to the maintenance of honor. The synthesis of justice and honor is in turn an essential component of Pashtun tribal identity and foundational for the interactions of Pashtuns with their surroundings, although not necessarily at the expense of other aspects of time and space. Contrary to Marten's claim, our article does not represent cultural reductionism. The objective of our article was to assess the reasons for the historical proto-insurgent tendencies of the Pashtun relative to their neighbors in a short, policy-relevant format. Our analysis clearly suggests that Pashtunwali is a central—if not the key—explanatory variable. At the same time, we do note that "tribalism and tribal social structure alone cannot account for [all] . . . insurgent behavior" (p. 54). It is a misrepresentation of our argument to claim that we believe that Pashtunwali is the only determining factor of Pashtun political life. A careful reading of our article will find a series of other temporal as well as spatial variables discussed. Similarly, we disagree with Marten's claim that we believe the Pashtun code is "set in stone," arguing instead that Pashtunwali is "intrinsically flexible and dynamic" (p. 59).

Marten also takes issue with our contention that the Pashtun follow a unique cognitive paradigm, and asks, "Different from whom?" Different from that found in the United States was a central and obvious point of the article. Here she elides our detailed description of Pashtun culture to "clan ties and the importance of upholding family honor," as if these were the only characteristics of the complex Pashtun society we describe. We think that our argument is considerably more nuanced, but grant that other preliterate tribal societies share some characteristics. Our point was that none of the dozens of other tribes in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region, either historically or today, share or have shared the Pashtun proclivity for jihad. The explanation for this,

2. Olivier Roy, *Afghanistan: Internal Politics and Socio-Economic Dynamics and Groupings* (Paris: National Center of Scientific Research, March 1, 2003), p. 4, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3e9ae535.html>.

when all else is equal both economically and geographically, is culture. Marten then raises the examples of other tribal societies far from the Pakistan-Afghan border. We do not feel that the existence of other tribes thousands of miles from the Pashtun belt with typically tribal value systems, such as her reference to Iraqi, Somali, or Chechen tribes, undermines our central argument. We would also suggest that it is more accurate to speak of Somali clans, clan families, or clan lineages rather than Somali “tribes” and “tribal codes of conduct.” Clan loyalty is the key in Somalia, not tribes.

Furthermore, Marten’s contention that Chechnya “was a quiescent part of the Soviet Union until the Gorbachev era” is unsustainable. In fact, the history of Chechnya is one of almost continual bloody revolution against Russian and Soviet rule, including major rebellions in 1722, 1785–91, 1816–27 (the time of the infamous Yermolov massacres), the Caucasus War of 1817–64, rebellions again in 1877–78, 1917, and 1929–39, with armed resistance continuing through the 1930s. The only reason Chechnya was “quiescent” for a short time in the 1940s and early 1950s was because of Joseph Stalin’s massacre or deportation of virtually the entire Chechen adult male population during World War II. As soon as the survivors returned home in the late 1950s, Chechen resistance began again and has essentially never stopped.³

MULLING OVER MULLAHS

Marten’s contention that we argue that “Islamist mullahs have simply been leading a traditional uprising against Soviet (and later U.S.) interference in Pashtun affairs” either misunderstands or misrepresents our point that such religious leaders seeking political power have used these traditional tropes and culturally understood methods of social mobilization to further their agendas.⁴ Although we readily agree that some of today’s village mullahs have sources of revenue independent of their villages, so too did most of the charismatic mullahs who fomented revolt against British and later Pakistani authority. These men, too, were not reliant on the financial support of their home villages, but rather, as itinerant travelers, were dependent on the traditional hospitality of villages and the critical support network immanent to the Pirimuridi tradition at mosques along the way. Among them were the Fakir of Ipi and the Mullah of Hadda, both of whom rose to influence primarily outside their home villages.⁵ Moreover, the independent income that village mullahs receive today from jihadist sources strikes us as a powerful argument in favor of our suggestion that tribal elders be reempowered with cash stipends, where appropriate, to help level the playing field in terms of the ability to leverage influence in Pashtun tribes. In this part of her argument, Marten uses the term “Islamist,” but we would argue that the term “Islamist” does not fully apply to the rural, often functionally illiterate mullahs of the mountain villages, who embody a far more syncretic version of Islam than that, say, of the Muslim Brotherhood, where the term is more applicable.

3. See John Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

4. See Sana Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo-Afghan Borderland* (New York: Columbia/Hurst, 2007).

5. See David B. Edwards, *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier* (Berkeley: University of California, 1996).

Moreover, in several instances, Marten seriously mischaracterizes our position. For example, when writing about the maliks favored by the British, she states, "Johnson and Mason argue that if these British-selected individuals became too cut off from tribal mores, they could be ousted by the jirga." Nowhere in our article do we make this argument.

MALIKS AND POWER RELATIONSHIPS

Elsewhere, Marten writes, "Johnson and Mason are correct that the maliks have provided 'the only stabilizing force that the region has ever known.'" This substantially misrepresents what we wrote. The article actually says that the "collective control" of the tribal elders and maliks "is the only stabilizing force the region has ever known" (p. 73), with the clear inference throughout the article that the tribal elders were by far the most important of the two. Our discussion of maliks was admittedly brief; they do still exist, at least in theory, in some parts of the border area, but their authority to speak for the tribes has been devastated to a far greater extent than that of the traditional role of the elders in Pashtun consciousness. Marten's apparent conflation of maliks and the more general term "village tribal elders" confuses much of her argument. Also, we find it curious that she raises the question, "If tribal culture is so powerful, how could the government force these malik-challenging mullahs on FATA society, any more than outsiders can force political penetration on the region today?" Obviously, the Pakistanis did not force the mullahs on FATA society; they were already there in the villages as they had been for centuries; what the Pakistanis did was pursue policies deliberately designed to empower them politically, economically, socially, and militarily at the expense of the elders, the maliks, and the government's Political Agents, resulting in the disastrous situation in the region today.

Most important, Marten questions our three-part formula of (1) trying to achieve some equilibrium in the border region through efforts to reestablish the social status quo ante 1970, (2) injecting a massive infusion of development aid, and (3) engaging in strong military action where necessary to implement parts (1) and (2). We grant fully that the Taliban and its network of radicalized mullahs have now assumed almost total political control over the FATA as well as over much of northern Pakistan and southern Afghanistan, and that our solution at this point represents a slender reed. Indeed, the situation has gone from very bad to much worse in the year plus since we initially drafted the article in the summer of 2007. Recently, however, we have seen a number of explicit and hopeful examples of a reawakening of the very power of traditional Pashtun social institutions and mechanisms we discussed, as this quotation from a recent *New York Times* article demonstrates: "The tribal militias, known as lashkars, have quickly become a crucial tool of Pakistan's strategy in the tribal belt. . . . The emergence of the lashkars is a sign of the tribesmen's rising frustration with the ruthlessness of the Taliban, but also of their traditional desire to run their own affairs and keep the Pakistani Army at bay. . . . The people of [the village of] Salarzai were strongly motivated to keep the Taliban at bay, said Jalal Uddin, the son of one of the prominent local elders. 'I felt overjoyed when I was riding with the lashkar because it meant the old tribal system was working,' Mr. Uddin said."⁶

6. Jane Perlez and Pir Zubair Shah, "Pakistan Uses Tribal Militias in Taliban War," *New York Times*,

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Olivier Roy succinctly sums up our argument concerning the vitality and power of traditional Pashtun social structures and institutions when he argues, "There is no other choice, in the short term, than to build on the traditional patterns of Afghan political culture instead of importing a ready made model of anything, including democracy."⁷ What are needed are realistic, implementable approaches to this vexing problem. Marten's alternative policy proposal of "inspiration and revolutionary empowerment of the ordinary Pashtun populace" strikes us as unrealistic and lacking any practicable implication for Western policy. Such vague formulations perhaps sound good in academic seminars, but are impossible to put into practice on the hard rocky ground where the first sign of a very bad day is still a burst of gunfire.

There are no easy answers to the catastrophe that has taken place in the FATA and the deadly danger that the situation there now poses to the West. What policymakers need is more understanding of Pashtun culture and a pragmatic approach based on what has worked in the past and less utopian rhetoric. Is our recommendation to put the "Old Guard" as Marten calls them back in power reflective of the highest ideals of human rights and democracy? We grant that it is not. But neither would be another mass casualty attack on the United States of the type witnessed on September 11, 2001, by an al-Qaida deeply embedded in the region and protected by the Taliban on both sides of the border. We believe that our admittedly imperfect prescription offers the best chance in a severely limited field of options for preventing such a scenario, while granting that even with an optimal implementation, it will take decades to undo the damage of the past thirty years.

—Thomas H. Johnson
Monterey, California

—M. Chris Mason
Washington, D.C.

October 24, 2008. Julian E. Barnes writes, "Confronting the prospect of failure after seven years in Afghanistan, the U.S. military is crafting a new strategy that is likely to expand the power and reach of that country's tribal militias while relying less on the increasingly troubled central government." Barnes, "U.S. Plans to Train Afghanistan Tribal Militias," *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 2008.

7. Roy, *Afghanistan*, p. 13.